

A Calendar of Events in the Life of an Atlantic Salmon

Late Fall

"Time to go back to the old neighborhood and raise a family."

FACTS: Following two years feeding in the ocean waters near Greenland, adult Atlantic salmon will return to the rivers where they were born to lay eggs of their own. They return in May and spawn in late October and November (depending on water temperature). Once in freshwater, the adults change color from ocean silver to rusty-orange.

"Life inside an eggshell beneath the bottom of the stream."

FACTS: Adult female Atlantic salmon dig a nest or a "redd" in the loose gravel of stream bottoms with their tail. A 12 pound female will lay a total of approximately 8,000 pea-size eggs in a series of redds that are each 4-12 inches deep—each redd dug upstream of the last one. Clean flowing water provides oxygen to help the eggs grow and hatch.

HINTS AND TIPS:

Healthy eggs are yellowy-orange.
Dead eggs are milky white.

Early Spring

*"What to bring for my big trip?
—Change of clothes (new digs, new clothes to match);—Change my tastes (saltwater is an acquired taste.)"*

FACTS: As the eggs continue to develop in the stream gravels, the two-year old kids, known as smolts, start getting ready to leave home. They change into a silvery coat to camouflage them at sea and they adapt for a life in saltwater.

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Late Spring

"Stream life begins... let's eat!"

FACTS: About 5000 of the eggs laid back in the fall hatch into "alevin" which are an inch long and still have a yolk sac for food. About a month later, alevin wiggle up from the gravel as "fry" and must find their own food—usually bacteria and other zooplankton including insect larvae when they first feed and later aquatic insects and other fish.

"Two more years and I'm outta here!"

FACTS: Eggs that hatched last year celebrate their first birthday, become "parr" and develop distinctive markings on their sides—dark vertical stripes with a single red dot inbetween. This outfit is like an invisibility cloak when the parr hover over the gravelly stream bottom.

"Be a salmon and see the world."

FACTS: Just as the younger kids are hatching and exploring the river, salmon smolt leave home and migrate downriver toward the sea in May or June.

HINTS AND TIPS:

Plan to be feeding fry at 50° to 55° Fahrenheit, about 2 weeks before releasing them to your local stream.

Summer

"I need a bigger room with a better view and long, hot summers can be no fun!"

FACTS:

FACTS: Atlantic salmon smolts gather southwest of Greenland and spend the next 2 years at sea. A few salmon spend as little as one year and a few as many as three years depending on their own internal clock but most spend two years at sea.

"I gained 10 pounds on the sandlance diet in just two years! Look at me now!"

FACTS: During their couple of years at sea, Atlantic salmon eat crustaceans and small fish and increase their weight to between eight and fifteen pounds.